

PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
BIOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON



## STUDIES OF NEOTROPICAL OPHIDIA.

## III.

ON HELMINTHOPHIS FLAVOTERMINATUS  
(PETERS, 1857).

BY AFRANIO DO AMARAL.

Herpetologists who will ever deal with the Neotropical species *Helminthophis flavotermiatus* will find it difficult to form a definite opinion as to whether or not this is a composite, especially if they rely only upon the bibliographic data as given out by Boulenger in his Cat. Sn. 1863. I: 5.

Indeed, having not long ago made a revisionary study of the genus *Helminthophis* (Proc. N. E. Zool. Club, 1924. IX: 25-30), I found it to be advisable to point out the inconsistency of Jan's figures for *H. flavotermiatus* as especially shown in fasciles I, pl. VI, fig. 10f and 9, pl. I, fig. 6e of his *Iconographie Générale des Ophidiens*. Then, however, I did not emphasize the difficulties I myself had to overcome to be able to assign this species a proper place among the *Helminthophes*. For this reason, I thought it to be necessary to write this note wherein I can deal with this question more at length.

Peters, in *Monatsber. d. königl. preuss. Akad. d. Wissensch. Berlin*, 1857: 402, was the first herpetologist that referred to the species *flavotermiatus* which he then included in the genus *Typhlops*. His original description was the following:

"T. corpore versus caudam crassiore; naribus inter scutella bina positis; scutello praeoculari scutellum superius tangente, capite caudaque flavibus, corpore reliquo nigro vel brunneo, squamis marginis dilutioribus."

Three years later, Jan, in *Icon. Gén. d. Ophidiens*, Dec., 1860 (1861), fasc. I, pls. V and VI, fig. 10, figured the species *flavotermiatus* under the new generic name *Idiolyphlops*. The type, he said, came from Caracas and belonged to the Hamburg Museum. According to the then

published Jan's plates, it had 24 scale rows and *its small ocular was separated from the third labial by a subocular.*

Later, Jan, in Arch. f. Naturgesch. 1861. I: 6, gave out the characters of his genus *Idiotyphlops* and discussed, in a footnote, the validity of Peter's genera *Rhinotyphlops* (type *albirostris*), *Typhlops* (type *flavotermi-natus*) and *Helminthophis* (type *frontalis*). Still in the same year, in Arch. Zool. Anat. Fisiol. Dec. 1861, I. 2: 186 (not Arch. Zool. Anat. Phys. 1862. 1: 186 as in Boulenger—Cat. Sn. 1893. I: 4), he emphasized the characteristics of his own genus *Idiotyphlops* by writing:

“Il genere *Idiotyphlops* mihi (tav. VI e VI f. 10), si distingue per la forma affatto particolare del nasale che ha una posizione orizzontale, per la straordinaria grandezza del primo labiale che al contrario negli altri Tiflopidi é sempre il più piccolo e per la posizione del piccolo scudetto in cui sta l' occhio.”

Peters apparently disliked Jan's above mentioned remarks on his genera, for he replied to Jan, by giving out, in Arch. f. Naturgesch. 1862. I: 43, a very detailed discussion of his own findings as compared with those of the latter herpetologist whom he in his turn very acrimoniously criticized. In his article he pointed out the disagreement between the characteristics of his own species *flavotermi-natus* and those assigned to it by Jan. He also showed how inaccurate most of the drawings made by Sordelli for Jan's Iconographie were, especially in this particular case. In regard to the existence of a subocular that separated the ocular from the supralabials in *flavotermi-natus* as shown in Jan's plate VI, fig. 10 f of fascicle I, Peters said:

“3) In Fig. f ist ein Suboculare gezeichnet, was gar nich existirt, indem das Oculare grösser ist und mit seinem unteren Winkel zwischen drittes und viertes Supralabiale hinabgeht.”

In his Elenco Sistematico degli Ofidi (p. 15) published in Milan in March, 1863, Jan did not make any reference to Peters' opinion and just kept *Typhlops flavotermi-natus* as a synonym of *Idiotyphlops* (*Helminthophis*) *flavotermi-natus*.

Two years later, however, Jan, in Icon. Gén. d. Ophidiens. Feb. 1865, fasc. 9, pl. I, fig. 6, published new figures of *flavotermi-natus* in which one finds *the ocular definitely contiguous to the third upper labial.* The specimen whereon those drawings were based he said were sent from Caracas to the Paris Museum where it was studied.

Since, on the one hand, it has been proved to be hopeless for me to locate those specimens used by Sordelli for his drawings and referred to by Jan as existing, one in the Milan Museum (received from the Hamburg Museum) and the other in the Paris Museum; and since, on the other hand, neither Boulenger in his Catalogue of Snakes, nor any of the less modern authors seems to have attempted to extricate this rather curious case of inconsistency of characters as assigned to *flavotermi-natus*, it might as well appear impossible for anybody at present to find out whether or not *flavotermi-natus* is a composite species. Therefore, it was my privilege

and luck to have happened to find, in the Library of the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy, a copy of a leaflet published probably in 1864 by Jan himself under the title of "Avis aux Naturalistes et Subscribers à l'Iconographie Générale des Ophidiens," on page 32 of which we meet with the following statement about the characteristics of the ocular in *Idiolyphlops*:

"Oculaire petite, squamiforme, à contact de la troisième labiale."

Moreover, in a footnote on the same page, Jan added as regards the contiguity of the ocular with the 3d labial:

"Ce caractère n'est pas indiqué sur la figure 10 f (Icon. livr. I, pl. VI) dont l'exactitude laisse beaucoup à désirer. Des détails diligemment reproduits seront publiés sur la pl. I (Icon. livr. 9)."

Now, I believe this statement by Jan himself definitely settles the question and shows that *Helminthophis flavoterminalis* is not a composite.

